

NARRATIVE

RESPECTING

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE

EARL OF SELKIRK'S SETTLEMENT

UPON RED RIVER,

IN THE YEAR 1816.

BY

ARCHIBALD MACDONALD.

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NARRATIVE, &c.

IN June 1813, I was appointed by the Earl of Selkirk to embark on board the ship Prince of Wales in the Orkney Islands, in charge of about ninety-three emigrants, destined for his Lordship's Settlement on Red River in North America. We accordingly proceeded to Hudson's Bay, and having landed at Churchill Factory, remained there from the middle of August 1813 to the beginning of April 1814; during which time I always saw the settlers supplied with their provisions and other necessaries. At the latter period I removed to York Factory with a division consisting of fifty-one persons, and from thence we proceeded to the Red River Settlement, where we arrived safe and in good health and high spirits, on the 22nd day of June, in that year. We found about one hundred persons already established in the Settlement, where they had been for a period of about

eighteen months, and had made considerable progress in breaking up land for cultivation.

Immediately on our arrival at the Settlement, potatoes to the amount of from forty to fifty bushels were given to the new settlers to plant for themselves in some land already broken up. The Settlement at this time consisted of about one hundred and fifty souls, all under the command of Captain Miles Macdonell, the Governor of the Colony. On the 12th day of July every head of a family was put in possession of a lot of one hundred acres of land, which they received with the greatest satisfaction, and instantly began building their houses and preparing the ground for sowing in the spring. About the 25th of July Mr. Macdonell, the Governor, left the Settlement for the purpose of proceeding to the coast of Hudson's Bay, to meet the settlers that were expected by the Company's ships that season, leaving me and another gentleman (Mr. Peter Fidler) in charge of the Settlement until his return. The settlers were so pleased with their situation and prospects that most of them availed themselves of this opportunity to transmit letters to their friends and relations in the Highlands, inviting them to join them on the banks of the Red River, and entrusted these letters to the care of Captain Miles Macdonell, for the purpose of being sent to the Highlands by the returning ships of the season.

The division of settlers, left by me at Churchill in the spring, arrived at the Colony under the charge of Mr. John Spencer about the latter end of August, at which period the Settlement consisted of nearly two hundred souls.

In the end of August Mr. Duncan Cameron and Mr. Alexander Macdonell, two of the partners in the North-West Company, arrived at a station belonging to that establishment, situated at the Forks, near the Red River Settlement, and a few days afterwards they apprehended Mr. John Spencer (who had acted as sheriff under Mr. Miles Macdonell), by virtue of a warrant issued by Mr. McLeod, one of the agents of the North-West Company, and carried him from the Settlement.

On Mr. Spencer's being arrested, it came to the ears of the settlers and servants, and the morning afterwards from forty to fifty of them assembled, of their own accord, at the Government House, pressing me to give them permission to release Mr. Spencer by force of arms; this I strongly objected to, notwithstanding which, they went down to the river side, in order to intercept the canoes in which Mr. Spencer and the party who apprehended him, were going down the river, but at Mr. Spencer's own solicitation they desisted from their intended attempts to rescue him, and he was accordingly carried away.

Shortly after the apprehension of Mr. Spencer, Mr. Alexander Macdonell (of the North-West Company) left the Forks, and did not return till the middle of May following; but Mr. Duncan Cameron (the other partner of that Company) remained there all that autumn, and the following winter and spring, during the whole of which period he did every thing in his power to gain influence over the settlers; and his attempts became gradually but too successful. He began by prevailing upon several of the heads of families to visit him at the Forks, where he treated them with the greatest attention; gave them dinners, balls, and large allowance of liquors and even of wine; in short, took every means he could devise to gain their confidence. He had the advantage of being able to talk to them in their native language (the Gaelic), and he very soon began to make them discontented with their situation and prospects. He told them that if they would go down to Canada they would receive lands there and every encouragement, and that he would find them a passage down in the following spring, and that if they did not avail themselves of that opportunity the Indians were determined to attack them and destroy the Settlement, though it afterwards appeared that the Indians were resolved to protect it. By these and other means, however, he gradually obtained complete influence over a considerable proportion of the settlers, who, in the course of the winter, laid

aside, and indeed even burnt some of the ploughs, harrows, and other implements of husbandry which they had been before cheerfully employed in making.

Captain Miles Macdonell returned to the Settlement about the 20th of October, and enrolled part of the settlers into a company of volunteers, giving each of them a Government musket and six rounds of ammunition for their own defence and that of the Colony. About the 16th of February, 1815, he again left the Settlement for Fort Daer, about three hundred miles distant upon the business of the Colony, leaving me in charge of the Settlement during his absence.

During the whole of that winter I always saw the settlers regularly supplied with provisions and other necessaries according to their wants. On or about the 10th day of February, 1815, I proposed to some of the unmarried men to go up to Fort Daer to get a supply of buffalo meat and provision, in case the stock of provision at the Settlement might fail; but they would not agree to go until they had consulted Mr. Cameron (of the North-West Company), and on their return they said they would not go, and that they would not allow themselves to be without provisions while there was any in Lord Selkirk's store, and that they would break it open if I did

not willingly give it them. From this period I always found most of the settlers of a riotous disposition ; and on the 3rd day of April, after they were served out with fourteen days' allowance of provisions, they were commissioned by Mr. Cameron to arrest me and two other gentlemen along with me, viz. Mr. James White, surgeon, and Mr. John Bourke, clerk. He himself, with twelve or fourteen of his men, all armed, assisted the settlers in making their way into one of the colonial warehouses, and robbed it of its artillery. After this date the greater part of the settlers removed with their families and all their effects to Mr. Cameron's house. Among the property which they carried away was a set of tools and farming utensils belonging to the Earl of Selkirk, also two field pieces and seven swivels belonging to his Lordship, together with twenty-five muskets and bayonets, furnished by Government. On the fifth I authorized one of our constables to apprehend one of the contracted servants of the Colony (Donald M'Kinnon) for aiding and assisting in taking away the said property, who was accordingly apprehended. A few hours afterwards, the Government House was surrounded with from sixty to seventy men, with muskets, guns, pistols, bayonets, &c. The Government House was burst open, several guns and pistols were then presented at me, and two other gentlemen, Mr. James White

and Mr. Alexander McLean, then with me in the room, and our lives threatened if we detained the prisoner any longer. This party was headed by two or three of the North-West Company's clerks, viz. William Shaw, Cuthbert Grant, and Peter Pangman Bostonois, the first of whom afterwards told me that they were authorized by Mr. Cameron to commit such violence.

By the 8th of April Captain Miles Macdonell returned from Fort Daer, and had one of the said clerks of the North-West-Company taken up for his conduct. On or about the 15th of May Mr. Alexander Macdonell, the partner of the North-West-Company, returned to the Forks, and brought down with him several of the Cree Indians, with a design of inducing them to fall upon the settlers and compel them to abandon the Settlement. These Indians were detained by Mr. Cameron for some days within his station at the Forks, but the chief of them found means to come to the Settlement, and, by means of an interpreter, told Captain Miles Macdonell that although they had been brought from so great a distance for the express purpose of driving the settlers away from the Settlement, and had been promised rewards by the North-West-Company's agent for their services, ye he assured him (Captain Macdonell) that they would not harm them. While the old Indian

chief was with Captain Macdonell, his son came from the Forks, and was very angry with his father for coming to the Settlement, and he took him back with him to the Forks. The party of Cree Indians, however, did not attempt to molest the settlers, and they returned a few days afterwards to their own country, having first sent to Captain Miles Macdonell a pipe of peace, as a token of their friendship.

About the 7th of June Mr. Alexander Macdonell removed about four miles below the Settlement, and formed a camp on the bank of the Red River, where he assembled a body of the North-West-Company's servants, and the half-breed Indians, (spurious descendants of the Canadian servants of the North-West Company, by Indian women,) together with those of the settlers who had previously joined them. They carried away with them the cows belonging to the Settlement, and killed and cut up the bull in the presence of Mr. Alexander Macdonell himself. He (Alexander Macdonell) at this period erected a battery, and mounted upon it the two field pieces which had been stolen, or forcibly taken away, from the Settlement. Upon the 11th of June two of the gentlemen belonging to the Settlement (Mr. James White, and Mr. John Bourke), were fired at from the willows, near the Government House.

On the twelfth and thirteenth, Mr. Cameron sent several messages and written orders to the gentlemen and people of the Colony, desiring us to leave it immediately, as he must see every one belonging to that establishment depart from it before he could leave the river. Late on the evening of the fifteenth I was down at the farm house, and as I was getting near the door, was surrounded by a body of armed men, headed by one of the North-West Company's clerks (William Shaw), and was desired to surrender to them but I resisted, and, in making my escape, was fired upon. On the morning of the tenth Mr. Alexander Macdonell, and a body of about sixty or seventy men, came and formed a battery close to the Government House, pillaged our farm house, and seized a number of our men.

Failing, however, in their object of intimidating or inducing the remainder of the settlers (about sixty in number) to leave the Settlement, they gave it out that their intention was only to arrest Captain Miles Macdonell, the Governor, who, they alledged, had been guilty of a crime in preventing some dried meat, called pinnican, from being carried from the territory, and shewing a warrant for his apprehension, they said that if he was delivered up they would leave the Settlement in peace, but if he was not delivered up to them they would attack

the Settlement, and take him dead or alive. The other gentlemen then remonstrated with Captain Macdonell, and represented to him that their lives, and those of their wives and children, should not be put in danger on his account. He, then, yielding to their wishes, surrendered himself to Mr. Duncan Cameron, by whom he was, in a few days, carried off to Canada.—Mr. Alexander Macdonell, upon the departure of Mr. Duncan Cameron, took the charge at the Forks.

About two o'clock on the morning of the twenty-second the Government House at the Settlement was attacked, and fired upon for about twenty minutes, but not a single shot was returned from the houses. The settlers then saw their error in believing that upon getting possession of the person of Captain Miles Macdonell, the party of the North-West Company would spare the Settlement; but having no means of defending themselves, and the determination of this party to destroy the Settlement being now openly expressed, we sent, on the twenty-third, a letter to Mr. Alexander Macdonell, stating that we should leave the Settlement in a few days, but that we expected our persons and property would be unmolested in the passage down the river. On the twenty-fourth two Indian chiefs, and from thirty-five to forty warriors of the Souteau nation, came to the Settlement, from whence they

went to the North-West Company's station to endeavour to prevail upon the party there to suffer the settlers to remain; but failing in this object, and regretting that their numbers did not render them sufficiently powerful to resist the North-West Company's party, who, from their numbers, and the artillery which they had carried off from the Settlement, were very formidable, they advised us to depart in the mean time, and to return afterwards, when they would bring down a greater number of their young men to defend us. Being informed that we intended to do so, they returned to the North-West Company's station to secure us a safe passage down the river.

On returning to the Settlement the two chiefs said that they and some of their young men would embark in the boats and escort us down the river, and that others of their men would go down the banks of the river to protect us. Under their escort we accordingly embarked in our boats on the 27th day of June, and proceeded down the river to its entrance in Lake Winipig, from whence, after parting with the Indians, we proceeded across the Lake, and established ourselves there till about the 7th day of August. A few days afterwards the whole, amounting to about sixty persons, of the said settlers set out on their return to the Red River Settlement, under the charge of Mr. C.

Robertson, accompanied by some Canadians, and I proceeded down to York Fort, for the purpose of returning to England, in order to inform the Earl of Selkirk of the transactions which had occurred. On my arrival at York Factory I met with eighty-four emigrants from Europe, newly arrived, and who also proceeded to the Settlement about the beginning of September.

ARCHIBALD MACDONALD.

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